

ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION IN DISTRIBUTED WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Bachelor's Thesis
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Abstract

Organizational socialization is an essential part in creating individual motivation, building effective teams and working organization. While the socialization process has been studied broadly as a process that includes lots of physical interaction, surprisingly little research has covered organizational socialization in distributed teams. Firstly, this bachelor's thesis examines the previous relevant literature on organizational socialization and distributed work. Secondly, my own findings from six semi-structured interviews are presented. The interviewees were all university students that had recently started distributed work at a new company. The interviewees represent different fields and different-sized companies. Finally, an updated framework on organizational socialization in distributed work is created from the results of the interviews. The findings suggest that so called distributed work barrier should be considered in distributed work socialization. The barrier consists of four factors: tradition trap, team silos, visibility wall and feedback failure. While ignoring the distributed work barrier most likely leads to ineffective socialization, taking it into consideration can dramatically enhance the socialization experience.

Keywords organizational socialization, onboarding, distributed work, remote work

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1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation

Organizational socialization, often referred to as onboarding, means a process through which new employees move from being organizational outsiders to becoming organizational insiders (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). Although an important factor in the success of employees and companies, organizational socialization is often overlooked (Caldwell & Peters, 2018; Cesário & Chambel, 2019). While lots of research around organizational socialization has been conducted, surprisingly little research has covered organizational socialization and onboarding process in distributed teams. Addressing this research gap is essential since the trend of adopting distributed work practices is growing. In this paper, distributed work is used to describe work that enables workers to access to their labour activities by the use of information and communication technologies (Nilles, 1997; Perez et al., 2003). Some authors use the terms like “telecommuting”, “telework”, or “remote work” to describe the specific types of distributed work. However, the current terminology overlaps a lot and is generally confusing. Hence the beforementioned definition and term “distributed work” is chosen instead of more niche definition.

The reasons behind the rising popularity of distributed work are manifold. Most recent motivation has come in the shape of COVID-19, which has caused companies worldwide to quickly adopt distributed work arrangements. Advances in technology, as well as the larger number of multinational and software-based companies also contribute to the increased numbers of distributed work adopters.

While the adaptation of distributed work has been shown to have benefits like increased productivity (Golden & Veiga, 2008), the negative effect should also be addressed. It has also been studied that the working in distributed work environments can bring unwanted side effects. For example, the difficulties in using communication technology can lead to inactivity and job dissatisfaction (Moe et al., 2020) The previous findings provide an interesting angle to study organizational socialization in distributed work.

1.2 Research objectives and research questions

The objective of the research is to ultimately create a new framework on organizational socialization process that addresses the distinctive characteristics of distributed work environments. The findings of the semi-structured interviews, as well as previous frameworks on onboarding, socialization and distributed work will be used in creating the framework.

Research questions are as follow:

- 1) How can theories on organizational socialization be implemented to fit the challenges of distributed work?
- 2) What are the effects of technology on organizational socialization?

1.3 Scope of research

The research will focus on employee actions and organizational actions that set the starting point for organizational socialization in distributed work environments. Adjustment to the organization as a combination of the beforementioned factors is then considered. While the outcomes like job satisfaction were not directly asked in the interviews, there were some interesting comments that made me decide to also include some level of discussion on the outcomes as well. Pre-entry actions like the effectiveness of the recruitment process are not viewed.

Although individual characteristics also determine how well an individual adjusts to a new organization, this is not the main interest in the research. There are a few reasons behind this. Firstly, the topic is too broad to be included as a part of this research. Secondly, studying the personal characteristics of the interviewees would have taken lots of effort and been prone to errors in measurement.

1.4 Methodology

The research is conducted in two phases. The first phase consists of a literature review on organizational socialization and distributed work. I also gathered information through six semi-structured interviews. The interviewees were selected among university students with recent experience in starting a job in a new remote work environment. The interviewees represent different types of companies so that the findings of the study can be better generalized. I will discuss methodology more thoroughly in chapter 3.

1.5 Structure of the research

The rest of the thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews previous literature on organizational socialization and distributed work. Most relevant frameworks will be presented and discussed. Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the conducted interviews. In chapter 4, I will present the results of the interviews conducted. Chapter 5 is reserved for discussion and conclusions.

2 Theoretical background

Theoretical background is divided into three sections. Firstly, I will discuss the literature on organizational socialization, then the literature on distributed work. Finally, I will go through literature that combines these two themes.

2.1 Organizational socialization

This section discusses organizational socialization. First, I will discuss the fundamental theories and research on organization, starting from the early days. Then I will introduce Bauer & Erdogan's framework on organizational socialization (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). This framework will be used as a base for the interviews and discussion. After that I will discuss recent trends and finally the limitations of previous studies.

2.1.1 Fundamental theories and research on organizational socialization

Organizational socialization is definitely not a new concept. The first article discussing the topic was published already in 1941. While the early literature was somewhat limited, in the 1990's the quality and quantity of the research was much increased. The concept of newcomer fit was also introduced. From year 2000 onwards, literature became more focused on not only the organizational efforts behind successful socialization, but also the importance of individual differences and proactivity (Allen et al., 2017).

Throughout the years, organizational socialization has been studied from different angles. From a broad library of studies, there are some that stand out and are the most relevant for this research. Van Maanen and Schein identified six tactics that organizations can use in the socialization process (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977). These tactics are collective/individual, formal/informal, sequential/random, fixed/variable, serial/disjunctive and investiture/divestiture. The tactics can also be separated between institutionalized and individualized tactics (Jones, 1986). Further research has shown the institutionalized socialization tactics tend to result in employees experiencing more positive job attitudes, higher levels of job fit, and lower levels of turnover (Bauer et al., 2007). However, the findings are not so black and white. For instance Cable et al. (2013)

have highlighted the benefits of a socialization programs focusing on individual proactivity. The findings of the study suggest that when socialization focuses on individual identity, the turnover rate is smaller and employees more effective. This contradicts with the beforementioned findings of Bauer et al. (2007).

The differences of individualized and institutionalized socialization tactics are especially interesting in a distributed work setting, where individual proactivity may be limited by technology. In distributed work environments some tactics, like the usage of role models are also harder to implement because of the physical distance. One goal of the research in this paper is to find out how the different socialization tactics work in different types of distributed organizations.

Another factor that may affects the effectiveness of a chosen socialization tactic (individual/institutionalized) is the role of individual characteristics. Widespread research on the topic started in the 1990's (Allen et al., 2017) and has been included into multiple frameworks ever since. Individual characteristics is also one of the main components of Bauer and Erdogan's framework, which acts as the fundamental framework for this research (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). Although the topic is interesting, individual characteristics are not discussed in this paper. The more specific reasons are mentioned previously in the introduction.

2.1.2 Bauer & Erdogan's framework on organizational socialization

One of the most influential papers on organization socialization is written by Bauer and her colleagues (Bauer et al., 2007). The authors identified three indicators of adjustment: role ambiguity, self-efficacy and social acceptance by organizational insiders. The findings have provoked lots of research and been cited in numerous publications (Allen et al., 2017). After the initial study, the framework has been updated to also include knowledge of organizational culture as an indicator of adjustment (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). The updated framework also acknowledges the role of new employee characteristics to organizational adjustment.

The framework created by Bauer and Erdogan is also the used in this research as a way of structuring the interviews and interpreting the results. As mentioned at the introduction chapter, new employee characteristics, as well as the outcomes of the

socialization process are not the focus of this research. However, there were still some indirect findings related to the outcomes. These findings will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter five. Below is an overview of the framework.

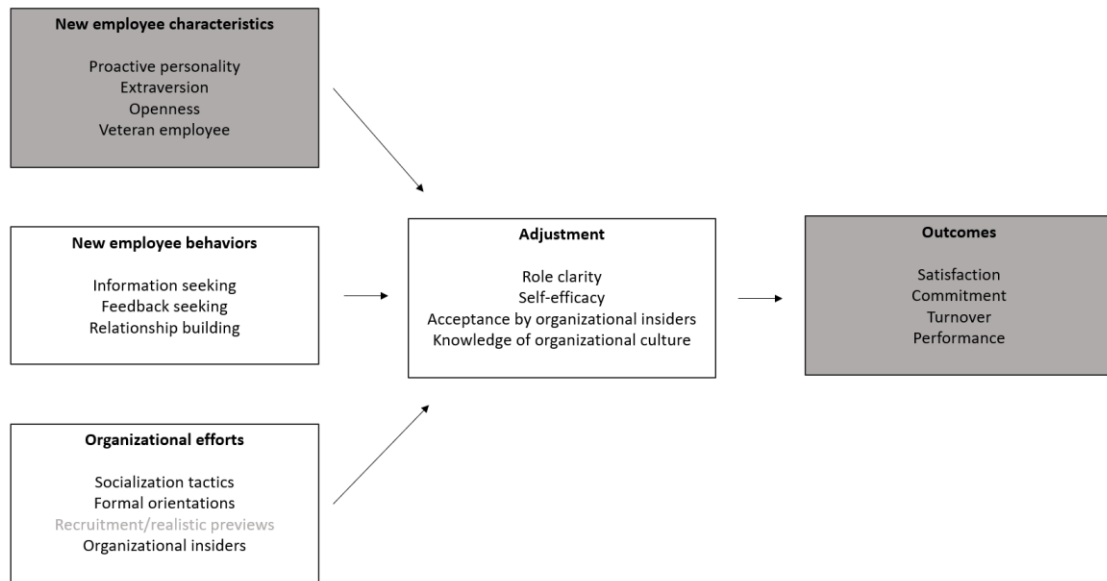


Figure 1: Framework by Bauer & Erdogan (2011). Grey areas were not focused on.

New employee behaviors

Information seeking is the first part of Bauer & Erdogan's framework. New employees always have to search different information, for instance related to their role, the organization and the tools used. Active information seeking can help especially in the situations where the company lacks institutionalized socialization (Gruman et al., 2006). However, if the employee is not active in information seeking, the lack of institutionalized socialization causes more issues. While the authors focus more on the actions of the individuals, it should be noted that especially in distributed work there are also other factors that influence the information seeking process. Instead of personal motivation, the cause for not asking information might be e.g. an online availability status, long answer times or uncertainty on if the other person would be interrupted or not.

Along with information seeking, feedback seeking is also helpful for a new employee. Like information seeking, feedback seeking is most beneficial in the organizations where

institutionalized socialization tactics are not implemented. On the other hand, institutionalized structures like regular feedback meetups, help desks or online information packages help in the feedback seeking process.

Final part of the new employee behaviors is relationship building. New employees can build social relations via arranging informal time to talk and participating into voluntary activities (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). Relationship building has been shown to have a major role in socialization outcomes like performance and satisfaction (Kim et al., 2005). While Bauer & Erdogan's definition of relationship building focuses on the individual actions only, it lacks to address the organizational structures that enable the relationship building to happen in the first place. In reality, the individual relationship building is closely linked with the underlying structures, habits, communication channels and culture inside the company. In this paper, the relationship building is viewed more from the perspective of the possibilities created by the organization, allowing for self-driven actions.

Organizational efforts

Socialization tactics refers to the different individualized and/or institutionalized tactics used by an organization in the socialization. Studies on different socialization tactics were introduced at the beginning of this chapter.

Formal orientation programs help new employees adapt into the organization. The type and length of the orientation vary depending on the company. Larger companies often opt for lectures, instruction videos or written material while smaller organizations may use different types of strategies. Furthermore, different orientation programs contain different levels of human interaction. It has been shown that computer-based orientation programs aren't as effective as orientation programs built around regular communications (Wesson & Gogus, 2005).

Bauer and Erdogan's definition for organizational insiders is a little vague. A better suited title would be "mentoring programs" since the authors only discuss the effects of formal mentors to newcomer adjustment. However, there are also lots of other factors than mentors that could be put under the title "organizational insiders". While the authors mention that organizational climate might also affect newcomer adjustment, there are

not any concrete examples and the definition for “organizational climate” remains unclear. One important effect of all organizational insiders, not just mentors is the sharing of best practices via documents or one-to-one discussion. In this paper, I extend the concept of organizational insiders to also address the sharing process of these best practices.

Adjustment

In Bauer and Erdogan’s framework, adjustment consists of role clarity, self-efficacy, acceptance of organizational insiders and knowledge of organizational culture. All of the factors have been studied to affect socialization outcomes (Adkins, 1995; Chao et al., 1994; J. D. Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003).

2.1.3 Recent trends in the research on organizational socialization

Recently, more effort has been being put into the research on negative effects of organizational socialization. For instance, (Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016) found that interpersonal conflicts with co-workers could eventually result in better task-related outcomes. If the conflicts do not affect task-related outcomes, it is more unlikely that the problems are addressed by the organizations themselves. This further highlights the importance of conversation as a tool for socialization. The negative effects have also been studied by e.g. (J. Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013) ,who found that newcomers often feel less supported in the organization over time. To include equal possibility for negative and positive socialization effects, the interview questions for my own research were created as neutral as possible.

Another new trend has been a more thorough focus on the individual factors of the organizational socialization process. For instance, instead of focusing on surrounding colleagues’ role to socialization in general, the recent literature has focused on the smaller details such as the role of managers. (Ellis et al., 2017) found that employees who are more proactive in communication and reporting about the results are more likely to be viewed as more committed to the socialization. This can lead to managers handing out more information, making seemingly less proactive people disadvantaged.

2.1.4 Limitations of the current research on organizational socialization

As mentioned, the current literature on organizational socialization often focuses heavily on on-location learning and face-to-face encounters. Further research is needed to address the socialization challenges caused by the introduction of distributed work. Furthermore, lots of the studies conducted have involved single case companies, making it harder to compare the socialization process between different fields and companies.

Also, as mentioned by Bauer & Erdogan (2011), the effects of the socialization process (adjustment, outcomes) are often viewed via collecting data over forms and surveys. While these methods make it possible to collect numeric data as well, there is not that much room for discussion or sharing the personal experiences more in-depth. Most of the studies are also conducted via lengthy longitudinal approach. My own study aims to provide a different approach via using semi-structured interviews and having a broader coverage through multiple fields. The methodology will be more thoroughly discussed in chapter three.

2.2 Distributed work

The following chapters consist of discussion on distributed work. Firstly, I will present benefits and challenges of distributed work, according to the current research. Secondly, I will introduce a couple of theories and frameworks on distributed work that can also be linked to the theories on organizational socialization.

2.2.1 Benefits and challenges of distributed work

Distributed work is a topic that has been studied a lot throughout the years. Some of the main benefits of distributed work are the increased productivity because of the time saved on travelling and fewer distractions (Golden & Veiga, 2008). Furthermore, distributed work has been shown to improve the feeling of autonomy (Morganson et al., 2010). In theory, distributed work also allows for easier balancing of work and family life. However, the research on this is somewhat contradicting.

Distributed work has also been shown to have major downsides like the challenges in figuring out organizational values and goals (Golden & Veiga, 2008). Also, the employees in such organizations have been found to feel weaker support from managers (Cooper & Kurland, 2002). Similar proposition on distributed work's deteriorating effects on manager-employee relations was made by Reinsch (1997). Managers' role in distributed work has also been studied by Poulsen & Ipsen, (2017), who found that to motivate employees, managers should also show intangible capabilities like listening, understanding, and acknowledgement. Since the relationship with managers has been studied to have a larger impact to satisfaction in virtual teams (Golden & Veiga, 2008), finding ways to increase the feelings of support is important.

Another concern regarding distributed work is the reduced visibility compared with traditional, on-location work (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012). The reduced visibility in manager's eyes may be harmful to the socialization process, as previously discussed (Reinsch, 1997). However, the concerns on reduced visibility do not necessarily have a negative impact by their own. If an employee worries of not being seen, he/she might be more proactive in bringing own opinions forward, ultimately resulting in a more positive socialization experience.

The beforementioned findings provide an interesting perspective into the organizational socialization process as well, since organizational insiders and the knowledge on organizational culture are one of the factors attributing to new employee's adjustment (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011).

2.2.2 Frameworks and theories on distributed work

Since the topic of remote work is broadly studied, there are also lots of theories and frameworks that overlap with the theories on organizational socialization. One such theory is job demands-resources theory (Demerouti et al., 2001), which divides working conditions into job demands and job resources, which help in achieving the demands. The demands consist of e.g. time pressure and physical workload while the resources contain e.g. feedback, participation and supervisor's support. According to the theory, job demands and job resources have to be in balance in order to achieve effective and meaningful work. The job demands-resources theory can also be linked to organizational

socialization, where there also demands like adjustment and performance, as well as resources like socialization programs.

Another framework also closely related to organizational socialization is the lifecycle model of virtual team management (Hertel et al., 2005). The model consists of different phases, starting from personnel selection and ending at disbanding. The order can also be linked to the frameworks on onboarding, (Bauer & Erdogan, 2012), starting from the recruitment and selection process of an employee, following up to the entry, proximal outcomes and distal outcomes. Phases B-D are especially relevant for my study since they are most closely linked to the socialization of a new employee. In the phase B, the authors address that almost all authors that have studied virtual team management suggest that in the beginning of distributed work, all members should meet face-to-face. This provides an interesting viewpoint for studying distributed work socialization where the on-location meetups aren't possible to arrange because of e.g. COVID-19.

In phase C of the framework, the authors discuss how performance can be managed in distance work. One of the main findings is that some virtual teams can be managed more efficiently by delegating tasks, setting objectives and giving feedback. This kind of a leadership is referred to as MBO, management by objectives. The studies on MBO have shown that getting both process feedback and socio-emotional feedback affect motivation and job satisfaction (Losada et al., 1990; Weisband, 2002).

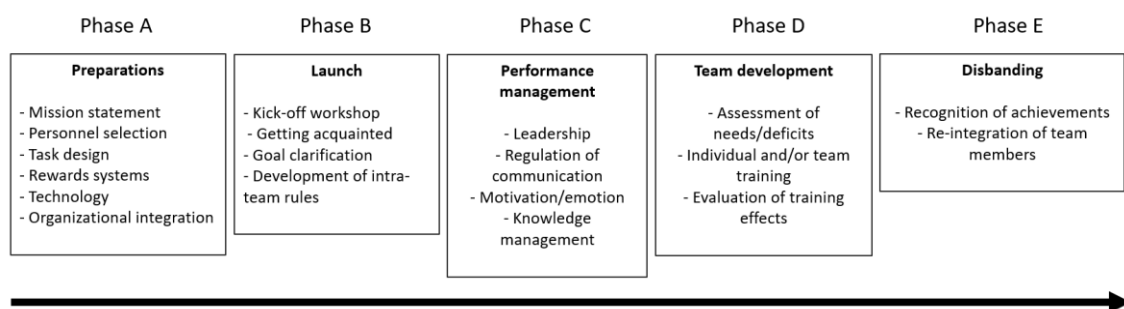


Figure 2: Framework of Hertel et al. (2005)

2.3 Distributed work and organizational socialization

This section is dedicated for a couple of the few existing studies combining distributed work and organizational socialization. First, I will present general findings from the previous studies. Then I will discuss how technology has been studied to impact the socialization process.

2.3.1 General

There is some research already touching organizational socialization in distributed work environments, especially software developers (Moe et al., 2020; Sharma & Stol, 2020; Stray et al., 2020). The reason why software developers are that heavily represented in the current literature is the fact that the turnover rate among them is so high. In addition, the nature of the job does not require a physical presence and the market for software developers is extremely global. However, as distributed work is becoming commonplace in other types of organizations as well, the scope of the research should be extended into other fields as well.

Organizational socialization (or onboarding) in distributed work has been studied by e.g. Taskin and Bridoux (Taskin & Bridoux, 2010). The authors suggest that even if the frequency of the distributed work is lowered, the negative impacts are still visible. The authors also discuss the importance of face-to-face communications.

Reinsch (1997) has also found the distributed work settings to have negative impacts to organizational socialization. The study focused mainly on the relationship between managers and employees who had recently started working in a distributed work environment. While there were generally more advantages than disadvantages, Reinsch found that the initial “honeymoon phase” between the employee and the manager deteriorated over time and highlighted the need to also address manager-employee relationships when making recruit decisions into distributed work environments.

2.3.2 Technology's role

Some study has also been conducted on how the difficulties in using communication technology can negatively affect the socialization process. For instance, the findings of (Moe et al., 2020) suggest that the lack of understanding of Slack, a communication tool popular especially in the tech industry, has a significant effect on the usage activity of these tools. In distributed work environments where digital communication tools form the basis for communication, the effects of not using the communication technology can be major. For instance, if the mentor of a new employee is not comfortable with using technology, he/she might retract on communication or otherwise be inactive. This inactivity may lead to employee dissatisfaction via less regular interaction and ineffective feedback seeking process (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011; Morganson et al., 2010). However, this isn't necessarily the case. For example (Chu & Chu, 2011) found the perceived ease of use of case company's intranet not affecting the actual usage rate.

Another interesting topic combining the theories on organizational socialization and distributed work is the use of enterprise social networks (ESN). By definition, ESN is a consumerised social network platform used within organization, offering features similar to social media platforms like Facebook (Ellison et al., 2015). These tools are often implemented into company intranet. Furthermore, software like Microsoft Teams is constantly evolving to include social media -like elements such as reactions, gif's and separate channels for informal communication.

Enterprise social networks have also been shown to have a role in longer term socialization (Oshri et al., 2007). Although ESNs are an important part in almost any organization, the importance is especially relevant in distributed work environments. A well-structured ESN helps to keep regularly up to date in distributed work environments where the outputs of the others and company culture are not necessarily otherwise visible. This research will also touch on the topic, figuring out how the ESNs are utilized in different remote work settings and for what purposes they are used.

Some authors like University of Münster, DE et al. (2018) have however found the use of ESN's to have negative impact to the adaptation to an organization. According to the authors, this is caused by the new employee not knowing the social norms and behaviours of the new role yet. Leidner et al. (2018) also discuss similar findings – the authors suggest that people active on enterprise's social media channels are not necessarily that focused on their own work. However, this statement is not valid in all

cases. The cause for utilizing ESN might as well be role-related information seeking or feedback seeking. Therefore, it is crucial to map out how the ESNs are used – not how much they are used – when determining the benefits and issues.

Media selection has also been shown to affect the socialization process. For instance Flanagin & Waldeck (2004) have discussed this and proposed in their paper that rich media channels like face to face communication,, will have a more major impact on organizational socialization, compared to lean media like email or chat.

2.4 Introduction to own findings

The findings of my study provide interesting insights on how organizational socialization is approached in different types of organizations. Most of the interviewees found feedback to be somehow insufficient and ineffective in the distributed work environment. Traditions from on-location work, as well as

Furthermore, the findings on the socialization strategies used were surprising. In some companies, the socialization efforts were manifold, while in some companies the efforts were not made at all. While the individualized strategies may work better in work done on-location, the lack of socialization-oriented activities made adapting into the organization generally harder.

3 Methodology

3.1 Data collection

To study how the socialization in distributed work is perceived in practice, I gathered 9 interviewees from different types of backgrounds. The study group consisted of people in their 20's, all of whom were university students. From all the interviews conducted, I picked six to be included in this paper. The selections were made so that the group would represent as many different types of backgrounds and people as possible. The final selection of interviewees is listed in the appendix.

The structure of the interviews followed Bauer's framework, presented earlier in the section discussing theoretical background. The questions were all targeted at different sections of the framework, starting from the employee actions, then proceeding to organizational behaviours and adjustment. Outcomes and new employee characteristics were not targeted with questions in such a direct way as the other components, to keep the focus in the parts most relevant to this study.

Interview questions were created in a way that they would not guide the answers to a certain direction. This meant that guiding terms like "negative", "positive", "upsides", "downsides", "benefits", etc. were avoided when possible. Also, in each part of the framework, there was a main question that was a bit vaguer. Then if necessary, I had a set of more specific questions related to the single points of interest. Setting up the broader question first ensured that the interviewees first addressed the things that were most prominent, instead of receiving thoughts from the interview questions themselves.

The length of each interview was approximately one hour. This allowed for a more flexible conversation and left room for further questions as well. In addition, since the specific questions were not shared beforehand, having enough time made it less likely for the interviewee to forget to mention relevant things. The language of the interviews was Finnish since I did not want the use of a foreign language to suppress the verbal expressions.

As mentioned by Bauer and Erdogan (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011), lots of studies on organizational socialization are built around collecting data in the form of forms or other methods aiming to determine the outcomes of the socialization process. However, the

authors also mention the importance of utilizing different methodology and creating new research from fresh angles. Keeping this in mind, the chosen methodology of semi-structured interviews works well.

3.2 Data analysis

From the nine interviews conducted, six were included in the final paper. The three people cut was because of couple of reasons. First of all, it ensures that the results can be more reasonable compared. Including all the interviewees would have easily made the study become more unfocused. Secondly, all of the three excluded interviews had some features that resulted in them being excluded.

One interview was left out because the company on hand was a newly founded family company and therefore the socialization process could not be viewed the same way as the other cases in this study. There was also a person working at a recently founded startup with only three employees. However, because of the low number of employees and the company still figuring out its first steps, meaningful comparison would have been extremely difficult. Finally, there was a person working at a university. However, maintaining the anonymity would have been almost impossible. The third interview was also left out so that all the organizations discussed would have something in common. Excluding the third interview meant that all of the organizations were private companies.

Each answer from the six interviews was then translated into a written form side by side. All of the answers were also translated from Finnish to English. To minimize the possibility for mistakes in translations or any other misunderstandings, the results were shared to all of the interviewees to read through. Since there was some overlap in the answers to the questions, the reported results did not necessarily arise during the questions targeted to that theme.

4 Results

4.1 New employee behaviours

Below I will go through the results regarding new employee behaviours. The findings follow the structure of Bauer & Erdogan's framework on organizational socialization (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). Information seeking will be first, followed by feedback seeking and relationship building.

4.1.1 Information seeking

The information seeking methods used by the interviewees varied. Information seeking in companies' intranet or a similar structure was mentioned by everyone. However, there were some differences in how information not found on internal databases was asked. Person A relied a lot on Google to find answers. If the answer was not found fast enough, then A sent a message to a co-worker. Person A mentioned that if the work would have occurred on location, asking co-workers would have probably been more common.

Asking questions was especially encouraged in organizations E and F. This was mostly due to the nature of the work conducted. As person E mentioned, a single error could have resulted in lots of unnecessary trouble. The supervisors and company culture had a large role. Person E stated that the encouragement of the team lead had the most influence in why contacting other people throughout the day was more than recommended. The team also had weekly meetings in which all the questions throughout the week were addressed. In person F's organization, contacting other people was also made effortless, mainly via a culture of keeping close track on the availability. To keep the availability status up to date, work schedules were created and published a few weeks in advance. Also, every day a Teams group with all the team members working that day was created. This allowed for planning out the lunch breaks so that someone was available all the time. Along with instant messaging, video calls were used a lot in organization F, even in short discussions. As person F stated, this meant that "the conversations were much more effective and it was simultaneously a great way to see co-workers".

While the information seeking process was relatively effective in some organizations, there were also negative notions regarding the distributed work arrangements. Person B mentioned: “While the answers were still relatively fast to get, the written answers sent by the IT personnel were often really short and seemed rude. This was the case mainly because of the differences in communication styles between the IT people and us.” While the answers received via a video call did not seem as rude, the message was harder to understand because of the technical slang. That is why inquiries in text format were still preferred despite the perceived rudeness. On the other hand, person B felt that it was easier to ask questions during the video calls, compared with the text formats.

4.1.2 Feedback seeking

Persons A, B and C all felt that the feedback lacked in some way. Person A would have wished for more feedback from the project leader, while person B would have wished for more thorough feedback instead of text replies. There were feedback meetings with the supervisor marked to the calendar but because of supervisor’s busy calendar these were not held at all. Person B mentioned that one time the supervisor had asked if B would have liked to have the meeting. However, feeling that this was not necessary considering the manager’s already busy schedule, person B answered that it was ok to cancel it. The lack of feedback was most noticeable in person C’s case. C mentioned that some feedback was given to the team in general, as well as in larger conversations. However, there was generally no personal feedback. According to person C, this caused issues in multiple ways. Firstly, C had produced really good sales figures and felt that the work input was left totally unnoticed. Secondly, as mentioned by person C, “Especially at a sales organization this is not ideal since the motivation is so heavily driven by a feeling. When you do not get the right feeling, it makes you stall and become passive”.

Persons D, E and F all did not have major complaints about the feedback received. As with all the others, they also found the feedback received over face-to-face discussions or video calls to be more effective than text-only replies. This was due to multiple reasons. For instance, seeing the other person helped in seeing the actual feelings and body language more effectively. It was also easier to have discussion on what to improve. Some interesting additions came from person F: “The platform on which the feedback is received doesn’t have that much impact when the feedback is only positive. However, when the goal is to learn from the feedback, I find that video is better than text or speech.”

Person B also shared that the effect of using video communications works in both ways: you can also see when people don't fully stand behind their words. This in turn had a slight negative impact.

There were some differences in how the interviewees felt their work input was visible to others. For instance, person D relied on weekly meetings to share the progress of the project on hand. Outside these weekly meetings, the work input had low visibility to other team members except the CEO (supervisor). An opposite example were organizations E and F, where all the work progress was written down for others to see. In organization E, a separate task tracking platform was utilized, while in organization F, the work input was constantly visible to other via a shared OneNote, where all of the ongoing tasks were listed. Even though everyone felt that their work input was at least somewhat visible to the managers and co-workers, this did not always translate into feedback. Person C mentioned that this was mainly due to the supervisor being busy with work. The lack of natural dialogue, combined with the busy schedule made feedback seeking really difficult.

4.1.3 Relationship building

Distributed work had interesting effects to the relationship building inside the organizations. Instead of face-to-face meetings, most of the relationship were formed via video calls. There were different approaches in how video was used. In organization A and B, the use of camera during video calls was specifically encouraged. In other organizations, there were not any guidelines for keeping camera on. Despite this, the more common trend was keeping camera on. This, as discussed in the previous chapter, meant that it was easier to interpret the emotions and get to know the faces of people working around.

Relationship building - or the lack thereof - in organization C was especially interesting. One reason is that the company is known and recognized for its great company culture. However, the socialization relies heavily on physical after work activities. As the organization has shifted to distributed work, these activities have also vanished. While it is obvious that COVID-19 has made these events impossible to organize in traditional ways, it was interesting that no alternatives had been implemented. This meant that apart from a brief introduction to co-workers, there was no informal interaction

whatsoever. There also were not any communication channels dedicated for informal communication. Even at the formal meetings like daily kick-offs or weekly meetings team members did not use the camera nor communicate between each other. Instead, the meetings were often monologue of one or two people. Person C also mentioned that this had impact on how competitive the environment was: “In previous on-location work the competition between co-workers has been more brotherly. However, since in the current job there have been basically no possibilities to get familiar with the team members, the co-workers feel much more like abstract opposition. The only goal then is to be at the top of the leaderboard.”

The environment in where relationship building happened also had an impact. Face-to-face communication on location was the most effective in relationship building. This was especially visible in person D’s case. D had communicated with a co-worker only remotely. When the two finally met on location, the conversation immediately turned more relaxed: “After meeting face to face, the conversation became more like talking with a friend. Even though the online conversation platforms were still the same than before meeting face-to-face, the tone of the conversations visibly changed.”

When on location meetups were not possible, video calls provided an alternative way of getting to know other people in a more informal setting. In almost every organization there were virtual coffee breaks during which the employees could talk more freely. The effectiveness of these breaks on relationship building relied much on the level that the conversations were kept informal. Person F experienced no trouble in keeping the informal meetings informal. This was mainly due to the supervisors’ activity in leading the conversation. Also, the company culture encouraged to separate informal and formal activities. Person B had a different experience: “Coffee breaks often turned into formal discussion. This was partly due to the team not seeing each other outside the virtual coffee breaks. Every time a supervisor participated to the meeting, the meetings stayed a bit more informal.” Person A also had experience in these coffee breaks, although they were organized with previous workers at the same role, not with the team. Person A felt that it would have made the socialization process easier if there would have been informal meetings with the team as well.

While video calls were often the preferred method for getting to know others, they also had some downsides. Person B mentioned that when the other side did not keep the camera on, it “felt as if you’re sharing more about yourself than the other is”. In addition,

few people said that it seemed to be generally harder for people to share their thoughts when using video calls. The effect was multiplied when there were more people at the call.

4.2 Organizational efforts

Below I will go through the results regarding organizational efforts. The findings follow the structure of Bauer & Erdogan's framework on organizational socialization (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). First, I will discuss socialization tactics, then formal orientations and finally the role of organizational insiders.

4.2.1 Socialization tactics

Organizations C and D used more individualized socialization tactics. This meant that the employees themselves had to be more active to socialize into the organization. Persons A and B felt that the socialization process equally individualized as it was individualized. Persons E and F felt that the socialization efforts were mostly driven by the organization and the team. Person E especially valued the efforts made by the team like informal birthday celebrations, as well as the encouraging atmosphere.

Person F mentioned that the large size of the organization meant that the processes were very well thought out. For instance, there were lots of different group activities arranged, ranging from hand crafts to sports. As mentioned before, the team arranged lots of informal coffee moments as well.

4.2.2 Formal orientations

The information on the organization in general was especially focused on in organization A. Throughout person A's orientation period there were multiple global videoconferences. Participation rate in these conferences was high, but sometimes the technical execution lacked: "Sometimes the speaker was in a larger room and the audio became muffled. The meetings with everyone at their laptops worked a lot better."

While person B also went through a formal orientation process, the orientation was scattered throughout the first months. The goal was to get all of the trainees who had started the work at different times at the lectures simultaneously. Since there were sometimes long breaks without any orientation activities, some of the information relevant to the work surfaced surprisingly late. For instance, the organization's core business only became clear to person B after a month of working at the company. The information was given by a mentor who was assigned roughly a month after starting the work. While the core tasks of person B did not require a thorough knowledge of the core business, B still felt that the information was welcomed.

All other persons but D and E had a clear orientation period, consisting of broader lectures, one-on-one meetings and introductions. Since D did some work from the office as well, it "was easier to be thrown into the deep end". Instead of a clear orientation, organization E used more of a body system where new employees got to see how the others did their tasks. Screen share was commonly used. Person E experienced that when the training happened via screen share, there were some things that dropped out, like the possible keyboard shortcuts used. Person C, who also had experience in orientation via screen share had a different opinion. C felt that it was easier to focus on the content that was displayed, compared with on-location training. Person F also felt the same and added that the orientation via screen share made it possible to practice simultaneously.

4.2.3 Organizational insiders

Person A and person B were the only ones who had a dedicated mentor. While person A had a dedicated mentor who had been in the same position before, the mentoring program in organization B was completely voluntary. Both found having a mentor to have a positive effect. However, although person A had regular video calls with the mentor, video calls with the team members were not that frequent as mentioned before.

Information was shared by the organizational insiders in different ways. For instance, in organization F there were written documents on which people had commented their own tips and tricks. Organization B and D on the other hand relied more on one-to-one meetings in sharing the best practices. Person B mentioned that since the inside information on best practices was not shared in a written form, it was hard to know who to contact in the beginning.

Person C, working at a sales department complained that it was relatively impossible to acquire any best practices from the insiders. Normally this would be achieved through watching other people do their work. However, in distance work there was no touchpoint on the best practices apart from one recorded call. C mentioned that having more recordings would have made it easier to adapt into the task.

4.3 Adjustment

Below I will go through the results regarding adjustment. The findings follow the structure of Bauer & Erdogan's framework on organizational socialization (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). First, I will discuss role clarity, followed by self-efficacy, acceptance by organizational insiders and knowledge of organizational culture.

4.3.1 Role clarity

Every interviewee experienced that their role in the team and organization had become clearer since the start. Persons B and D both experienced the start difficult in terms of how to spend their work time. Person B stated that there was some level of guilt involved as there was no proper guidance on what to do between the first online lectures. While B used the time to go through the company intranet as advised, there was still a strong feeling of uncertainty. Person D also had times when there was nothing to do before a question got answered by the supervisor. However, in the end of the work period, these problems were not that visible anymore.

4.3.2 Self-efficacy

Every person reflected that their confidence with doing the work was high. Everyone also reported that the confidence grew compared to the start of the job. Person A felt that the distributed work affected the feeling self-efficacy in some ways. One example of this is that people were not participating into the discussion that actively at video calls. This made it a little more difficult to assess and improve the level of self-efficacy.

Person C mentioned that that the distributed work in fact made things a little too comfortable. Once C got confident with the job, the workdays also became shorter. Since organization C only viewed the results, it was easy for person C to work only a couple of hours a day from home, instead of the full eight hours. The fancy office environment and co-workers on the other hand encouraged to do full days on-location. As C mentioned, the shorter workdays did not cause any issues at a personal level. Instead, the organization was the one who suffered the most.

4.3.3 Acceptance by organizational insiders

Interviewees' general opinion was that they integrated into their own team well. However, there were some issues in integrating into the whole organization. This was mentioned by persons A, B and F. Person D mentioned that once the nature of the work changed from full time to part-time, the team simultaneously became a little more distant again.

4.3.4 Knowledge of organizational culture

All of the interviewees answered that they knew the organizations culture, values and terminology relatively well. In organization E, these factors were mostly visible at the daily work. In organizations A, B and F, formal orientation and lectures were at a larger role.

5 Discussion and conclusions

In this section, I will first propose an updated framework based on the framework by Bauer & Erdogan (2011). After presenting the framework, I will discuss the individual elements, linking them to previous findings and the results from my own interviews. Finally, I will consider the limitations and topics for future research.

5.1 Updated framework on distributed work socialization

Based on the interviews, I have put together a framework that takes the challenges of distributed work into consideration. Bauer & Erdogan's framework from 2011 is used as a base (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). In the updated framework, a distributed work barrier is added before the adjustment and outcomes. The barrier consists of different pitfalls that organizations may face when the socialization happens remotely. While the pitfalls themselves have a negative impact on the socialization process, addressing them helps to create more effective socialization.

While Bauer & Erdogan's framework regards the socialization outcomes as a result of adjustment, the findings of my study suggest a slightly different view. Many of the answers suggest that the information seeking process or different socialization tactics may have a large impact on the outcomes like turnover directly.

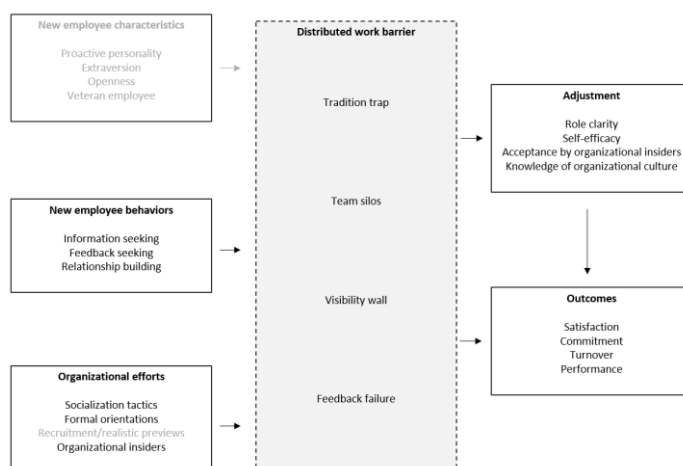


Figure 3.1: An updated framework on organizational socialization in distributed work environments.

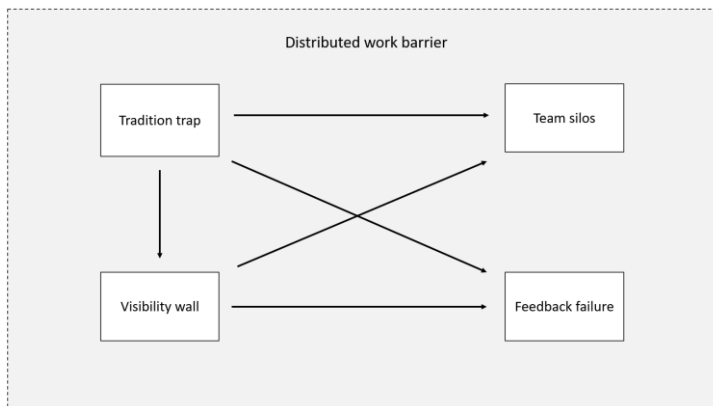


Figure 3.2: More specific view on the distributed work barrier and how different sections are related

5.1.1 Tradition trap

Tradition trap refers to the situation where organization's socialization efforts have relied heavily on on-location activities and events like afterparties. Since these activities are so commonplace, their role in integrating new people inside the organization may not be considered that much. Referring to the job demands-resources theory by Demerouti et al. (2001), the afterwork activities aren't recognized as a resource worth compensating for. When this type of organization then shifts to distributed work, it might be the case that no effort is made to create alternative ways of relationship building. In extreme cases, this might lead to the new employee not knowing the co-workers at all and creating a sense of loneliness. In the context of the distributed work barrier, tradition trap therefore also increases the possibility for the formation of team silos. In the interviews conducted, this kind of tradition trap was mostly visible in organization C.

The effect of traditions was not only visible in the lack of afterwork activities. Instead, other socialization activities like the learning of best practices were also affected, as mentioned by person C. Same goes with delegating and reporting tasks. If an organization does not rethink how tasks are delegated and updated, it can make adaptation into the new organization harder. Best example of this is person B, who felt quilt and uncertainty when only going through the company intranet the first day. Similar findings were reported by person D who had periods where there was nothing to do. However, unlike person B, D did not experience any feelings of quilt.

While the approach of “finding information yourself” works in traditional settings where individual tasks are transparent and it is easier to get direct feedback on what to do, in distributed work it is different. According to the answers it seems that companies using individualized socialization tactics are more prone to suffering from tradition trap. While this does not mean that individualized tactics are automatically worse, the findings suggest that extra caution should be used in these companies. The findings are more in line with the research (e.g. Bauer et al., 2007) that highlight the positive effects of institutionalized socialization tactics, compared to the negative effects mentioned by e.g. Cable et al. (2013).

Traditions can also be used as an advantage. When the initial tradition trap is addressed and new traditions are created, socialization becomes more effective. This was visible in organizations A and F, both of which had lots of experience in working remotely.

5.1.2 Visibility wall

Visibility wall refers to the low visibility of individual work status inside the team and the organization. This also means the availability status when working online. Furthermore, visibility wall affects how well the new employee knows people from other teams inside the organization. Team silos resulting from the low visibility between teams are discussed separately later.

As mentioned, the traditions inside the company had their own part in creating the visibility wall. Along with traditions, the use of ESN's and media richness also had major impact. ESN's helped in a couple of ways. First of all, ESN's helped in getting to know other people via free-time activities (person F). Secondly, they had an impact via enabling other people to see the work made by others and receiving recognition (e.g. persons B, C). While recognition via ESN's was regarded as a positive thing, there was variation in how active people were in these channels. This implies that more focus should be put into researching how people could be activated to use ESN's. The technology in itself didn't cause any issues, contradictory to the findings of Moe et al. (2020).

Media richness also affects the level of the visibility wall. As person E put it, it was harder to see what other people around did when there was no on-location face-to-face dialogue.

Extreme example of visibility wall's impact was in company C, where the visibility wall between team members created a more competitive and more negative environment compared with on-location work. To avoid this, rich media channels should be actively used to minimize the effects of visibility wall. However, while video calls are the best option for online-only communications, the findings suggest that face-to-face communication is still the preferable way for socialization, supporting the previous findings of Taskin & Bridoux (2010).

A couple of great examples on tackling the visibility wall came from organizations E and F. In organization E, the use of a specific progress-tracking platform helped in knowing what other team members were working on. In organization F, the individual availability status was updated down to the lunch breaks.

5.1.3 Feedback failure

Most of the interviewees mentioned that the amount of feedback was too low or that the feedback was not effective. While every interviewee received feedback in written form, this feedback was not as thorough as feedback received via video calls or face-to-face discussion. This finding is in line with e.g. Flanagin & Waldeck's (2004) findings that the use of rich media often results in more effective socialization. The positive effects of rich media usage also support the findings of Weisband (2002) regarding the importance of socio-emotional feedback. However, lean media feedback still has its role as a method of transferring simpler messages that are easy to process.

Somewhat surprisingly the low amount of effective feedback was not mostly caused by low visibility of employees' outputs. Instead, the causes were more in how managers used the data and different communication channels to give feedback. While individual proactivity helped in getting feedback, this is not an optimal arrangement according to the interviews. The answers imply that in distributed work it is harder to suggest rich media feedback sessions proactively, partly because of the visibility wall that prevented seeing how busy the supervisor was.

Studies also point out the positive effects of managerial practices like listening and acknowledgement in distributed work, as mentioned earlier (Poulsen & Ipsen, 2017). Simultaneously, if the supervisor is not proactive in giving quality feedback, it might

affect the performance and motivation negatively. Given this important role of feedback, surprisingly little effort was put into feedback by the managers and organizations.

5.1.4 Team silos

Multiple persons answered that team members were much more familiar than other people inside the organization. While most of the organizations also had larger scale lectures aiming for a better understanding of the organization around, the people didn't become that familiar. The main reasons behind this were the lack of informal channels and minimal usage of rich media channels outside own team. The findings support the findings of Oshri et al. (2007), who stated that the use of IT should be used as a help in socialization.

According to the answers, the time in which the possible socialization events outside the team took place also affected. The possibilities for building social relationships outside the team were often arranged after workday. This made the motivation for participation lower, when already the people had a full workday of staring screen behind.

Best example of team silos in action is person E, who would have hoped for more more possibilities to communicate with other teams. The lack of information on the other teams in the organization made it harder for E to make future plans inside the organization. Although person E planned to continue in the organization, this kind of misinformation may lead to higher level of turnover when scaled up.

5.2 Implications to practice

The findings of the research suggest that especially media richness and the usage of technology should be focused on more by organizations utilizing distributed work. Aside from just the frequency of communication and feedback, more emphasis should be put into how the communication is approached.

By encouraging the usage of rich media like video calls across the organization, new employees will receive more effective feedback and see more possibilities to continue inside the company. While it is understandably easy for managers to opt for short

feedback via messages, the study shows that managers should also be more proactive in giving feedback. Another possibility is to make sure that work status is always accurate and encourage communication any time people are available. This way it is easier for new employee to ask feedback and find information in distributed work.

Bauer & Erdogan's framework is a little abstract for companies to utilize. Adding concreteness to the framework in the form of distributed work barrier helps to build a model that is easier to understand. The updated framework is especially relevant for organizations that have just shifted or are planning to shift in distributed work.

5.3 Limitations and future research

Like any study, my own paper also has its limitations. Below I will go through the limitations to my methodology and discuss possibilities for further research based on the findings.

5.3.1 Limitations

Although the study did provide interesting results, it had some limitations that should be noted. First of all, narrowing the collected data down to six interviews may have altered the outcomes of the results. Also, the fact that most of the interviewees were acquainted with the interviewer may have a slight impact. This familiarity may have made it harder to share the personal difficulties faced, for the fear of being seen as weak.

One factor that also affects the results is the somewhat long time between starting the job and the interviews. While this was not the case with all the interviewees, there might still be some error in results caused by people not remembering the facts and specific details correctly. Having more representatives from each field would have minimized the effect of this, as well as made the findings easier to generalize.

Because of COVID-19, the shift to remote work has caught many companies cold feet. It is likely that the organizational socialization process is not the first thing that is considered. Also, since the situation is so new, the companies might have not had the time or the data to improve their organizational processes. Therefore, the overall

experiences on starting as a new employee might generally be more negative compared to a situation where the socialization processes have been thoroughly thought out.

Along with all the beforementioned factors, the absence of throughout analysis on individual characteristics makes it harder to create a comprehensive framework based on the findings. While some evidence on individual characteristics was visible during the interviews and could be judged by the answers, the effects are impossible to interpret accurately.

5.3.2 Future research

Since the effects of individual characteristics for distributed work socialization were not properly analysed, it could be an interesting starting point for future research. For instance, the effects of different pitfalls in distributed work barrier probably depend on the personality as well. While not addressing the barrier still makes the socialization process more ineffective for extroverted people, they probably have better chances of pushing through the distributed work barrier.

Another angle would be to study sales organizations and teams specifically. Since the findings from organization C were so dramatic, it would be interesting to see if similar findings are found in other sales organizations as well. The effect of competition on organizational socialization is especially fascinating. According to my research it could be so that in distributed work environments the co-workers are seen as more abstract competition, making socialization efforts less effective. However, further research is definitely needed since my own findings on the topic are deducted from a single interview.

Finally, it could be beneficial to focus on the actual process of shifting into distributed work instead of only outcomes. This would expand the scope of the current research. It would be fruitful to study how the shift to distributed work socialization should be done and how the process can constantly be improved. Research on this would help organizations in different industries to plan more effective distributed work socialization programs more quickly.

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7 Appendices

Table 1: Interview questions

NEW EMPLOYEE BEHAVIORS	ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORTS	ADJUSTMENT
Information seeking	Socialization tactics	Role clarity
What are the first things that come to your mind about finding information in the organization?	How did you eventually fit into the organization? Was it more the effort of the organization or did you have to be more proactive?	In what level did you understand your role in the team you belonged to?
How did you find finding information related to your role? -> compare with previous workplaces	Did you have regular meetings (formal or informal)?	In what level did you understand your role in the whole organization?
How did you find finding information related to your <i>organization</i> ?	Formal orientations	What factors had the most influence in understanding your role (manager, coworkers, online documents, online courses, intranet etc.)?
How did you find asking information from your coworkers or manager?	How did you find the length of the orientation?	Self-efficacy
How did the use of electronic platforms affect the information seeking/asking process?	Was the orientation program clear enough to follow?	How confident you became/are with the job? How has this changed throughout the orientation period?
Feedback seeking	Organizational insiders	What impact does the distance work have in this regard?
What are the first things that come to your mind about receiving feedback in the organization?	Did you have a dedicated person responsible for the orientation?	Acceptance by organizational insiders
How do you find the amount of feedback received?	How did you find this arrangement (in distributed work)?	How well did you integrate into the team? What impact did distributed work arrangements have?
How well do you evaluate your manager and coworkers saw your work input? - any examples?		Knowledge of organizational culture
Do you find that the way in which the feedback was given (lean media/rich media) affected the effectiveness of the feedback?		How well do you estimate you know the goals, values and unique language of the organization?
Did you learn some best practices from coworkers? If yes, elaborate how the learning happened?		
Relationship building		
How did relationship building inside the organization happen?		
What was your overall opinion on these activities?		
Who were the closest people to you?		
How did technology affect relationship building?		

Table 2: Interviewees

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Industry	Software development	Energy	Finance	Digital marketing/sales digitalization consulting	Finance	Law firm
Size	Large	Large	Medium	Small (also low hierarchy)	Large	Large
Global/domestic	Global	Domestic (global firm)	Domestic	Domestic	Global	Global
Team size	10-15, divided into a couple of smaller units	5-10	10-15	Not a fixed team. The teams were mostly based around projects and customers	5-10	5-10
Different communication channels used (WhatsApp, Teams, intranet, Slack etc.)	Google chat, Google video calls, email, intranet	Intranet, Google Meet, Google chat, Gmail, no WhatsApp or other informal channels	Teams, intranet, no WhatsApp, no informal groups or chats	Slack, Google Meets, Drive, WhatsApp	Email, a platform like intranet, task status platform, Skype, WhatsApp group	Email, Teams, WhatsApp for informal use, intranet
Were there anyone else at the same position (starting new)?	Another summer trainee	Two more trainees, started at different times	Had worked at the company for four weeks. A couple of people started at the same time.	One person started at the same time	Two more who started later	A couple of others who started at the same team
Experience at the job	Few months as a full-time employee, currently works part-time	Few months full time, does not currently work at the company	Has worked at the company for one month, part-time work	Few months full time, does not currently work at the company	Few months as full-time employee, does not currently work at the company	Has worker at the company for one month
Prior work experience	Not directly a same type of a job	Not directly a same type of a job, some experience via volunteering.	Have done sales before, not distance job before.	Full-time office jobs	Job at a global company but at a different industry.	Experience on similar, although more independent work.
Prior experience in a distributed work environment	Some single tasks done remotely, not in this scale	Some single tasks done remotely, not in this scale	No previous experience	No previous experience	No previous experience	Few months at the end of the previous job
Prior experience with the communication tools used	No experience, no trouble in learning	Mostly familiar, no trouble in learning	Familiar	Familiar	Familiar	Familiar